

Generational Perspectives on Premature Campaigning and Its Perceived Influence on Voting Preference

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Although premature campaigning is considered illegal in the Philippines, it is still a widespread practice characterised mainly by the display of posters featuring politicians' months before the official election period. This study seeks to shed light on people's views across generations on premature campaigning and its possible effects on voting preferences. Using a descriptive mixed-methods research approach utilising surveys and interviews, data was collected from a diverse sample of participants representing Generation Z (Gen Z), Generation Y (millennials), Generation X (Gen X) and baby boomers. The research questions aim to explore respondents' attitudes towards premature campaigning, whether or not they find the practice acceptable, and the reasons behind their opinions. In addition, the study analyses scenarios in which respondents are asked a question to determine whether their voting preferences would be positively or negatively influenced by premature campaigning activities. Analysis of the data collected included statistical techniques, specifically Chi-Square and Pearson Correlation, as well as thematic coding to identify patterns and differences in views across age groups. The results showed that opinions differed between generations but were consistent when grouped by sex, highest level of education and social status. It is expected that these findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities of premature campaigning in the Philippines. They will inform policy makers, election authorities and political analysts about the acceptability of premature campaigning and its impact on the electoral process. Furthermore, the study emphasises the need for clearer regulatory frameworks and enforcement mechanisms to address the challenges posed by premature campaigning and ensure the integrity of democratic elections, thus contributing to the improvement of electoral practises and governance in the Philippines.

Keywords: generational perspectives, political activities, premature campaigning, electoral, behaviour and policies

1. Introduction

Premature or early campaigning involves political activities that take place before the official campaign period established by the electoral rules (Escovilla, 2019; Sison, 2009; Cruz, 2023). Candidates or political parties often engage in advertising, public appearances, distribution of promotional materials, and other voter outreach efforts ahead of the legally established campaign

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period (Glavas, 2017). This practice raises significant legal and ethical issues. Legally, it may violate election laws, which are designed to ensure a level playing field by giving all candidates equal time to present their programmes to voters. The regulations typically set specific time limits to prevent undue influence and maintain order and fairness in the electoral process. For example, the 1985 Omnibus Election Code of the Philippines (Republic Act No. 881) explicitly prohibits premature campaigning, stating that any activities aimed at attracting voters before the official campaign period are illegal. Nevertheless, premature campaigning is widespread, and often starts months or even a year before the elections (Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility-Philippines, 2021; Shahani, 2015). Currently, political candidates, or those believed to be running, are displaying their images in public spaces more than a year before the May 2025 mid-term elections, which has led to considerable discussion on social media.

Premature campaigning can be observed in various forms. According to Cruz (2023), this includes the formation of organisations, associations, clubs, committees, or other groups of people with the intention of soliciting votes or conducting campaigns for or against a candidate. It also includes the holding of political caucuses, conferences, meetings, rallies, parades, or similar gatherings for the purpose of soliciting votes or undertaking any campaign or propaganda for or against candidates. Other practices include making speeches, announcements, or commentaries, or conducting interviews that support or oppose the election of any candidate for public office; publishing or distributing campaign materials designed to support or oppose any candidate; and directly or indirectly soliciting votes, pledges or support for or against a candidate. The Commission on Elections and election stakeholders in the Philippines have urged the electorate not to support politicians engaged in premature campaigning (Pantini, 2021). Despite these efforts, the engagement of politicians in such practices seems to continue unabated, and the election results suggest that people continue to vote for these politicians, suggesting that reminders of the illegality of these practises have little to no effect.

Zajonc (1968) explains that familiarity leads to liking or disliking, a phenomenon known as the Mere Exposure Effect. This psychological concept states that the more people are exposed to something, the more they tend to favour it. The Mere Exposure Effect occurs because repeated exposure to a person, image or object reduces insecurity towards that person or object. Historically, humans are primed to be cautious around new things that could be potentially dangerous. However, repeated encounters with the same stimuli without negative consequences lead them to conclude that there is nothing to fear. Consequently, people develop a more positive attitude towards familiar things than new ones. Remarkably, people are often unaware of the influence of the Mere Exposure Effect on their preferences. This psychological principle explains why politicians engage in premature campaigning—they want to increase their visibility and familiarity with voters in the hope that this repeated exposure will translate into votes on election day.

Since it is important to understand the perspective of the people, especially the registered voters who are the decision-makers in electing national leaders in democratic countries like the Philippines, it is imperative to examine the attitude towards premature campaigning. As it is a prohibited practice, public opinion on premature campaigning can show its influence on voting preferences and reveal voter bias. Analysing these perspectives is critical to understanding how people think in political contexts and to developing measures to protect the integrity of the electoral process.

Based on this premise, the researcher conducted this study with the following objectives:

1. To find out people's attitudes towards premature campaigning and whether or not they consider the practice acceptable.
2. To find out the underlying reasons behind their opinions
3. To determine whether the voting decisions of the majority are positively or negatively influenced by premature campaigning.
4. To determine whether people are biased towards political personalities.
5. To differentiate people's point of view, the influence of the practise on voting preference and people's bias based on their demographic profile, especially generation/age.

2. Methodology

This study implemented a descriptive mixed-method research design. It was conducted in Region IV-A in the Philippines, the region with the highest number of registered voters (Nazario, 2022) and involved 307 Filipino respondents who are at least 15 years old and registered voters as of February 2024. The Random Sampling technique was used to select the respondents, 103 of whom were from Cavite, 91 from Laguna, 65 from Quezon, and 48 from Batangas province. The minimum age was set at 15 because 15-year-olds are already eligible to vote in the Philippines. Each village in the Philippines has a youth organisation that functions as part of the local government called "Sangguniang Kabataan." Those eligible to vote for its officials are between 15 and 30 years old, while candidates for office are between 18 and 24 years old (Republic Act No. 11768; Republic Act No. 10742). The data collection consisted of two parts: Online surveys were conducted, followed by face-to-face interviews with all respondents. To analyze the collected data, frequencies and percentages were calculated, a thematic analysis was performed, and differentiation and correlation were assessed using statistical tests such as Chi-Square and Pearson Correlation.

Some of the questions asked:

- Is premature campaigning acceptable or unacceptable to you?

Those who find it acceptable were asked:

- If a politician you don't favour campaigned prematurely, would you change your mind and consider voting for that politician on election day?

Those who find it unacceptable were asked:

- If you favoured a politician, and this politician campaigned prematurely, would you change your mind and find the politician unfavorable so that you would not vote for them?

These questions aimed to determine whether premature campaigning influences voting decisions, the nature of this influence (positive or negative) and whether voters have prejudices against this practice.

In general, the majority of Filipino voters consider the practice of premature campaigning unacceptable, with 67 per cent of respondents being of this opinion. On the other hand, 33 per cent believe that premature campaigning can be tolerated. This minority opinion could be influenced by statements of the Commission on Elections and Supreme Court decisions on premature campaigning. Former Commission on Elections spokesperson James Jimenez, amid the widespread display of campaign banners throughout the country in 2021 in preparation for the 2022 Philippine national elections, explained that in order to violate election policy and be guilty of premature campaigning, one must first be an official candidate or that there should at least be an existing official candidate for the upcoming election. He stated, "So since there is no official candidate, there can be no crime or rather offense of premature campaigning" (Gonzales, 2021). Similarly, in the 2009 case of *Penera v Commission on Elections* it was held that unlawful acts or omissions involving a candidate do not take effect until the official campaign period begins, since official candidates are not identified until that time (*Rosalinda A. Penera vs. Commission on Elections and Edgar T. Andanar*, G.R. No. 181613). However, these positions have led to confusion as to what constitutes premature campaigning, underscoring the need for clearer provisions in the law.

Table 1. Does premature campaigning influence voting preference?

	Influence on voting preference					
	Yes		No		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Acceptable	77	75%	25	25%	102	100%
Not Acceptable	113	55%	92	45%	205	100%
Total	190	62%	117	38%	307	100%

Table 2. Premature campaigning influence on voting preference

	Influence on voting preference					
	Positive		Negative		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Acceptable	113	59%	77	41%	190	100%
Not Acceptable	25	21%	92	79%	117	100%
Total	138	45%	169	55%	307	100%

In terms of influence on voting preferences, a significant portion of the population, i.e. 6 out of 10 Filipinos, indicated that premature campaigning affects their decisions on election day, while 38 per cent indicated that it does not. The data also shows that the voting preferences of 4 out of 10 people are negatively affected by this practice. Of those who believe premature campaigning is acceptable, some argued that if they do not initially like a candidate but see them engaging in premature campaigning, they may eventually consider voting for them. However, 59 per cent of this group will not be persuaded to vote for such candidates. Conversely, 21 per cent of those who find this practice unacceptable said they would no longer support a candidate campaigning immaturely. This shows that only a small percentage are positively influenced by this practice, while 79 per cent would still vote for their favoured politician, suggesting a bias towards political figures.

These results clearly indicate that premature campaigning is likely to have a negative impact on voting preferences. The data also suggest that premature campaigning does not discourage people from voting for their preferred candidates, even if they find the practice unacceptable. Rather, it can give the favoured candidates an advantage on election day. Remarkably, those who find premature campaigning acceptable are also biased and express that premature campaigning does not change their perception if they do not like a candidate. This implies that while this practice may help to maintain the support of those who already favour certain candidates, it does not help to change the minds of those who dislike them before the election period.

Main reasons why Filipino voters consider premature campaigning is acceptable

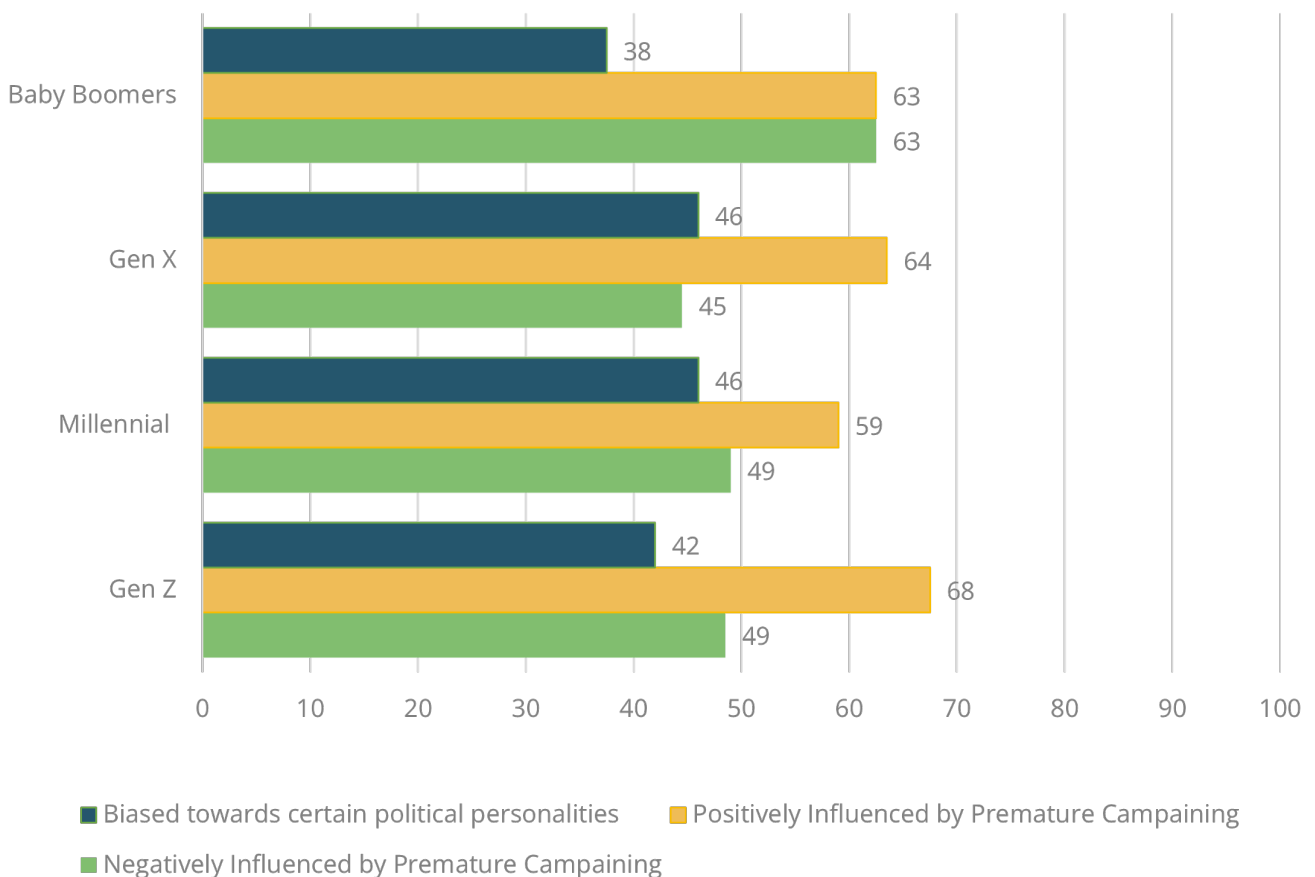
The most important reason is *Information and Awareness*. Many respondents believe that premature campaigning helps voters familiarise themselves with the candidates and their programmes. They argue that the official campaign period is not enough time to get to know the aspiring politicians and that they need earlier campaign activities. Although this is a violation of a law, they also argue that this helps to gather information about the candidates, so that they can make informed decisions at the polls. Another argument from these people is related to *Tradition and Habit*. Some respondents mention that premature campaigning has become a common practice in Philippine politics; they see it as something that happens regularly before elections and consider it acceptable in this context. *Accessibility and Reminder* is also their reason. Some expressed that premature campaigning reminds voters of the upcoming election, and thus encouraged the public to participate in the electoral process. Apart from verifying their voter data to enable smooth voting, being reminded also allows people to learn about and evaluate incumbent politicians who might run for re-election. Finally, some people argued within the premise of *Preparation and Strategy*. Some respondents believe that premature campaigning is a strategic move for candidates to become known to voters, particularly those that are not yet known and who do not have many resources compared to their opponents. They argued that candidates can increase their chances of winning in this way.

Main reasons why Filipino voters consider premature campaigning unacceptable

The main reason is the *Violation of Campaigning Regulations* as set out in the Omnibus Election Code of the Philippines. Second is *Perceived environmental impact*. Concerns about environmental pollution and visual clutter caused by the dispersal of campaign materials, especially when left unattended after elections, were frequently cited by the respondents. It was difficult to control the distribution of posters, stickers, and other campaign materials during the official campaign period, so allowing this to be done earlier would definitely exacerbate the problem and lead to

more clutter and waste in cities. Another argument is Unfair Advantage. In contrast to those who find this practice acceptable, people who think that premature campaigning is unacceptable argue that it gives an unfair advantage to well-funded candidates who can afford to campaign extensively and early, and an obvious disadvantage to those with less resources. Some people also expressed that *premature campaigning could distract elected officials from their duties and responsibilities*, particularly those seeking to run for re-election. If these politicians prioritise their personal political ambitions over their duties in the final year or months of their term, they may neglect their work as sitting officials. Finally, there were voters who said that *premature campaigning does not respect the intelligence of voters* because it assumes that early exposure will sway their opinion before they have fully considered their choice.

Figure 1. Does premature campaigning influence voting preference?



The survey shows that among the four generations, Baby Boomers are the most problematic in relation to premature campaigning. Although the difference is not significant, they are the most in favour of this practise, even though it is a violation of the election code. Unfortunately, they are also the most influenced by it, suggesting that premature campaigning is most effective in making them favourably disposed towards a candidate, which is concerning. Following Baby Boomers, Millennials also show problematic attitudes and influence. 49 per cent of them were persuaded to vote for political candidates by premature campaigning. This suggests that the Mere Exposure Effect, although occurring in the context of an illegal activity, is most effective among Baby Boomers

and Millennials. Data also showed that the majority of Gen Z find the practise unacceptable, and that it significantly influences their voting preferences. Recording the highest percentage in terms of positive influence, 67.5 per cent of Gen Z said that they will not vote for a politician on election day if they campaign prematurely, indicating a strong rejection of political candidates who violate election guidelines. After Gen Z, Gen X is the least problematic when it comes to the influence of this practise on voting preferences. Most of Gen X, like Gen Z, find premature campaigning unacceptable and are influenced by the practice in similar ways, particularly in terms of the impact of premature campaigning on political preference. These two generational groups tend to change their views depending on how much a political personality engages in premature campaigning.

Based on the data, Millennials exhibit the highest bias towards politicians among all generational groups surveyed. Although the majority finds premature campaigning unacceptable, 46 per cent of Millennials stated they would still vote for a candidate they favoured even if that candidate campaigned prematurely. This indicates a significant tolerance among Millennials for this practice. They focus primarily on their preferred candidates and less on the ethical implications of premature campaigning. Following Millennials, Gen X also shows a bias of 46 per cent, although the data suggests that their bias is primarily influenced by their attitude towards candidates they don't like. Unlike Millennials, Gen X respondents, who find premature campaigning acceptable, are less influenced by it, and maintain their dislike of a candidate despite their campaign activity leading up to the election. In contrast, Baby Boomers show the least bias, only 3 of every 10 express bias against politicians. Despite being the most influenced by premature campaigning in their voting decisions, Baby Boomers overall exhibit a lower bias against political personalities compared to Millennials and Gen X. These results show that Baby Boomers are most influenced by illegal activities in their voting decisions, while Millennials are the most tolerant of premature campaigning. The latter often focus on the candidates they support, regardless of their involvement in such practices, which sets them apart from other generations.

The survey results also suggest that in terms of voting decisions and electoral behavior, Millennials closely resemble Baby Boomers as the most influenced by political activities, particularly those based on the Mere Exposure Effect. Millennials also show less regard for electoral policies compared to other generations. Conversely, Gen Z aligns more closely with Gen X. They are the least likely to be swayed by premature campaigning, particularly in terms of negative influence, and place great importance on candidates adhering to campaign policies. This alignment is supported by Hook Research Ltd (2019), which argues that Gen X and Gen Z have similarities in personality and decision-making processes. Moreover, an article from BoomAgain.com highlights the similarities between Baby Boomers and Millennials, emphasising shared values such as family, volunteering and religion. Both generations also prioritise community involvement and social issues. This is probably due to the fact that they grew up in a time when social awareness of gender equality, ethnic diversity, and other social issues was heightened. These similarities suggest that, in addition to these characteristics, Baby Boomers and Millennials may also share similar perspectives or behaviours in politics, particularly in voting.

Lastly, it is striking that despite the improvements in the voting behaviour of younger generations, particularly Gen Z, who have a more rational outlook, a significant number of them still disregard electoral policies and display a bias towards political candidates. The study shows that overall, 3 in 10 Gen Z find premature campaigning acceptable, while 32.5 per cent of those who find

it unacceptable are still biased by voting for their preferred candidates despite engaging in such practises. This suggests that complying with election laws and reducing bias is a challenge among some young voters.

Differences in the attitude of the Filipino electorate towards premature campaigning and its influence on their voting preference

People's attitudes, the practice's influence on their voting preference, and their bias for political personalities do not differ according to sex, level of education and social class. Females and males, people with a high level of education and those without a degree, rich and poor people have statistically the same attitude towards premature campaigning. They believe that this practice is unacceptable, but they are usually biased in their voting decisions. This suggests that sex, education level and social class cannot be used to predict whether a person will take electoral policies into high consideration before deciding who to vote for or not.

3. Conclusion

This study presents a comprehensive overview of premature campaigning in the Philippines. Most Filipinos believe that premature campaigning is unacceptable, but despite their opposition, it significantly influences their voting decisions, often with negative implications. Remarkably, more Filipinos are inclined to vote for politicians who engage in premature campaigning than those who do not. This paradox is partly explained by the Mere Exposure Effect, which influences most Filipinos and leads to a bias towards political personalities. Generational differences are evident: Baby Boomers and Millennials are the most influenced by the Mere Exposure Effect and show the least consideration for electoral policy violations, while Gen Z and Gen X are less affected by Mere Exposure Effect. Furthermore, Millennials and Gen Xs show the strongest bias towards political personalities, whereas Baby Boomers and Gen Z are less biased, with the latter showing a preference to change their voting decisions based on campaign activity, although Baby Boomers are less concerned about policy violations compared to Gen Z. In addition, premature campaigning proves to be effective in maintaining the support of those already in favour of certain candidates, but it is less effective in changing the minds of those who are initially opposed. The novelty of this study lies in the detailed examination of the contradictory perceptions and behaviours associated with premature campaigning and the different effects across different generations. Its significance is underscored by the pressing need for stricter enforcement of campaign regulations and voter education to uphold democratic integrity and foster a better-informed electorate. For example, there is a need to launch an extensive public education campaign focused on the detrimental effects of premature campaigning, particularly how this practise undermines the integrity of elections. These education campaigns should specifically target Baby Boomers and Millennials. The results also call for stricter legislation and enforcement to curb premature campaigning, which starts with taking swift and decisive action against violators of electoral regulations.

In response to varying perspectives, targeted messages need to be developed to address the specific concerns and vulnerabilities of each demographic group. Since Baby Boomers and Millennials are the least likely to pay attention to electoral policies, they can be subjects of electoral

policy orientation. On the other hand, Gen Z, which is more receptive to electoral policies and less biased towards political figures, can participate in voter education programmes aimed at changing the behaviour of others. This also means that now is the time to empower younger generations to take on leadership roles in advocating for fair and ethical electoral practises. The government should therefore create opportunities for youth-led initiatives aimed at promoting accountability and integrity in the political process. The role that academic institutions play in this process should also be emphasised. Since most Gen Z are still studying, civic education should be integrated into school curricula. There is a must to teach students about the importance of voting rights, democratic principles, and the role of citizens in holding aspiring politicians and elected officials accountable. Overall, these findings highlight critical areas for policy and strategic interventions to mitigate the impact of premature election campaigns and improve the fairness of the electoral process in the Philippines.

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